

## **LATE OCTOBER**

### **Poems**



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**BOSTON**

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Late October

Sky depth and  
the moon –  
the grass world here below  
rainy and wet  
  
night misting chill on the pond

and the lens of the air all around misting –  
a frosty steam near the moon's whited face

see amethyst webs  
in a pine tree's moonlit weft,  
see the still half laden boughs of leaves and fruit  
on crab apple trees in the field,  
the prayer-beaded and rain-pocked oak clusters  
hanging still,  
feel frost-browned grass now chill and hollow-stiff  
and wet underfoot

See up into the night-well, deep,  
looking up into it so high –  
dark leaves fringe the walls that are barreled around my gaze,  
the leaves' swaying pulse in breezes  
of the storm yet coming,  
and there will be winds –  
though still only breezes as yet –  
the cold autumn storms  
felt all around preparing

## The Early Thaw

Ice encrusted on the branch of the apple tree  
melting in the sun

first thaw of late winter,  
earliest edge of spring

thaw-steam in sun mist  
in the distance,  
and the trees are wreathed in a fine film of light

Early this morning still dark  
as I left to walk out,  
a flaking skin of ice skimmed up from the porch's wooden steps  
as I walk down them

the hollow sound of my steps



Two Summer Afternoons, Warm and Still

When you descended  
    through the leaves  
active bright stirring  
    and bright silence  
  
    something suddenly known  
  
    a ginger ale cloud of light floss  
        in the still warmth  
    in the steeped air  
in the tilted cube of sunlight  
    athwart the empty space in the yard  
        near the corner  
    spiral points floating  
        abundance  
            so empty  
        fathomless depth of light

Above all, sky depth  
    blue, still, filled with  
        a more, a different light

Depths of memory  
    of a day so far in the past  
when I was a child  
  
    watching, listening

## Early Morning Rain and Wind

Bronze light above of the black cleft of the hill,  
green outline through the mountain's fissure,  
wind so steady through the oncoming rain –  
weighted grass that drags at my boot as I step through  
walking toward the sun

where is the sun? and why not yet?

Leaves gold and burnt orange dull and ragged,  
trees slashed through with pitchforks of the  
heavy rain last night  
still dripping, the wind-dented and  
raked-through tree tops,  
still leaves hanging, eaten through with the cold –

the rain pouring down the window all night long,  
the wind pushing hard against the window pane  
shaking the tree limbs down,  
and I found them scattered across the driveway in  
the morning as I stepped out  
pulling my collar up around my neck,  
pulling my cap down

Sun earliest edge within clouds like the dim light in  
embers,  
clouds of charcoal  
and the black tree limbs are stiff in the wind

sun struggling, parting its wings of light through the  
coal bright smolder dust of dark clouds

morning wind, I am watching  
morning wind, with rain slash  
rain not yet over  
more rain graining the new light breaking through  
air all around wet bright,  
chill wind, rain morning storm  
all through the air, all through my eyes,  
my seeing, my face

By the Roadside at the Edge of Town

A splinter is there  
    inside the green of the hill,  
        and the blue day

light shard for the eye, and the soul is  
    up above somewhere  
around in the brightness, the warm waver of air,  
    benzene fumes of light

We are here watching looking seeing –  
    I have somehow been drawn forth by this,  
        but where are we, and what? –

blade of light through the day  
    makes a cut through time

And the road runs on  
    through the fields,  
past the burning globes of the green hills,  
    the rippling wheat of the green corn showered through  
        with sun

And the road is nearly white, so dry –  
    above, the cirrus clouds so thin and high seem to flake off  
        the belled depths of the sky –

and here at my foot no shadow can be seen,  
    gray dusty hot pebbles and green  
        dandelion sprays,  
            and off a ways there  
the slight blue shine of the road tar

A river of warm dry air flows through the gulley –  
the bushes scarcely show it,  
but inside the day's silent burn and rustle of heat  
there is something still and there is something moving

The Old Park in Late October

Autumn

bones of trees

and closing roots in earth

hands

few hands, but  
many fingers

the open secret of rain, the rain

dark brown the earth,

light brown the woods

and with rained-on gold

Gray clouds in the windy sky

Sudden blue then –

the clearing and then pouring sun right through

all at once slightly warm

but then cold again

Thin bright sun of autumn in the cold basin of rain water

with forsythia yellow leaves, red and amber leaves,

and gold leaves

with green blushes along their stems

Cold water so clear

the open secrets of rain

water never quite still with wind across it and the sun in a corner

and reflections –

a hand here and there a face

Spring Day

Sun

branch

watching the loud wind-light

mid-day light river of steady air currents,  
the trees' bend and tension

the uppermost branches just leaved with green  
twisting as they lean

and it is early spring

bright agitation, here and now

no memory of anything at all

only this air and light, this being taken up into it  
if only in feeling, breathing, sight –

and yet why say only, why suggest merely? –

maple trees with their light green twirling seeds  
spiraling in handfuls out across the street

and there a white-haired lady, our neighbor,  
steps out the side door of her house  
and waves cheerfully  
before disappearing into her back yard

To the Lake in the Evening

Leaf-silence and rain drip –

leaf-breath, tiny movements held in,  
the woods holding quiet and still,  
unfolding after a rain

The air's scent is cool on my skin,  
I breathe the damp taste of earth

I shiver,  
and my scrotum contracts with the chill

There is dampness and growing dark  
at the edge of the trees,  
then the yellow, mercurochrome bars of the sunset  
fall slanting downward through leaves afloat in the streams  
of dust-glare  
that choir through the still twilight woods –  
magnetized particles spin

In the forest of yellow light-smoke,  
in radiant quivers the strands of light  
smolder through forms, streaming onward,  
golden floss adrift, burning

Then the sunset's blood clot of light erupts through the silence –  
it sounds from beneath the charred outline of hills,  
shaking and shaking the world

Then gradually, quickly, the light becomes silent with sundown

Through the unsettled agitation of leaves the breeze rises, then stops,  
reawakens, subsides



The night is the darkness now, here and now,  
the dark falls and falls through itself in the tense striations

What is expected?

The night is a network of points – of points falling and falling  
and falling – points of time where space rushes to enter,  
points of space out of which time is blaring,  
a burning annunciation, a fire, a drumming from far down below  
like the pounding of blood in my ear

Over the dark planes of space,  
through the ripples of time, drunk  
with the poppy of deep recollection,  
I, listening, move outward to witness –

Over the lustrous oil of the starry night pond, adrift over the face  
of the moon,  
hearing the lunar voice of the sister,

The loved one, the lost and her children

## Allurements

### Unbearable spring

awakening restless  
discordant  
the mind

closing up the earthen the subterranean  
passages  
the ear listening  
for another word

but there are only whispering suggestions  
sparks struck off through the leaves  
in the luminous aftermath of the rain

with a sharply painful breeze almost building to a wind  
a storm coming and yet not quite

and I spread my light green jacket wide to catch more of it,  
wind breaker the light jacket was always called –

gathering some of the breezes the jacket lifting a bit  
and I am born along

I am 13 years old

Lightning in the late storm sky that night  
lightning, and more lightning, that I could not understand –  
empty the pages of the missal in the darkness of stone arches  
and the blank page like dim sand at the bottom of a stream

something huge and yet intangible, and yet escaping farther  
leaving then a mere fragment of the dark  
of the night itself, like a piece broken off

And then in the morning the bright breeze once again cool  
so very tangible all around me  
as I walked back from school

real and newly born these things finite infinite

in motion

and I, amid the allurements

On the Road Late

Autumn night of storm  
so full of wind

the rain not yet

metal cages of the bare tree crowns  
crevice-like against illuminated sky,  
an ash blue slate

black branches reaching beetle legs  
through the white face of the moon

past it, the obscure configurations of stars

the streaming graphite of rolling clouds to the east

In the depths of the street  
are houses, bright windows,  
baled-up hedges now bare –  
closer they are tossing wicker baskets and waving  
mandibles

blue gray sidewalk puddled with late rain  
more cold rain not yet falling, but soon

and so I must hurry

Return

Patchwork of the fallen leaves

half-rotted tapestries  
of the trees  
the image still visible

darkness, and light-stippled shadow

yet a light-crumb  
steps its fingers through,  
touches the floors of memory

and the sun lies buried far underneath,  
it is asleep there

so certain of itself it can lie disguised as darkness

Powers of the building structures, the  
gatherings

these the without-precedent  
prepare their return

A Clear Day with Some Memories

A field in the North Country in September  
and the air is warm still, light glinting  
through the tree crowns

cabbage whites tumble as they rise  
in a spill of sunlight, with mullein near

farther in the distance  
the grass is yellow brown, light green,  
and rolls in gradual waves  
toward the border line

the sun is straight above, still almost hot

Hereabouts crevices of rock are cut through by the highway,  
making canyons of thirty and forty feet  
on either side the lanes

but here on the top wave of the great crest of the plateau,  
you can see straight through to the horizon

The St. Lawrence lies beyond,  
and the ancient battle grounds, burial grounds

Queen Anne's lace and dandelion near the sill of a rising slope

at the curbside there is crab grass and timothy  
in the ditch by the hacked fence post

## Summer Storm

Lightning rips down through the night's dress

soft hill breasts revealed –  
a flickering bright moment

another eye-blink

and the light bulb filament of lightning sparks  
wiggling down  
at the core of the sky's bulb

then the bulb bursting –  
sudden exploding loud

and the air's ice is cracking open,  
ice avalanche  
the whole ice tray of heaven dropped to the sky's floor –

rushing ice shards of the sudden rain sound,  
and then rain

and hail  
like dented white marbles

A sudden wind from the night held in cold storage behind this one  
floods in and around

and we have to run inside,  
although we try to take bits of it with us

By the Small Creek

Noon of a bright silence –  
listen for  
what is beyond  
yet here

water braiding sand  
weavings  
under shadow-spotted gold –  
one place sun-threaded  
near the bottom

of an elusive location  
there  
not there

Sleep then wake listen for  
what is inside the day  
what is outside the day –  
many, many the days  
yet only one now

Well of attention to the stream's surface  
a depthless well, and yet of all depth

single the moment,  
however many



Current like a steady wind  
    blowing the water's ragged raying sunflower –  
        light-seeds streaming along its surface

swift and twisted boughs: the apple tree of glare

    and filaments pulled toward the stream's edges  
        are like high bright grass in a wind

The blue spring day is a profusion of sun and clouds –

    soon the new grain, the wheat, the apples, tomatoes  
        wicker baskets of peas, pears, and grapes:  
            the fields, the gardens opening without limit –

yet it's already shining here, near the bottom of amber, the sand dust

        some like a grained dark linen,  
    the ancient text woven  
        of light sparkle

Noon of a bright silence, and yet clamor – therefore

    see what is here  
        yet beyond

## New Power

Morning light washes the white wall with  
flakes of gold

There's a spackle of ice crystals  
on the white-framed windowpane,  
and I draw the drapes back wider to look outside

The sky is brightening from its deep lilac  
and there are still a few points of stars

Dark blue rags of snow clouds float in a wash of copper  
and green tints,  
on the opposite street below  
the rows of bare trees are dark brown, like burlap,  
and somewhat burnt-looking

The street is the color of tin, at the intersection  
car exhaust is like dry ice vapor

Some children are in a clump at the cross walk,  
waiting on the crossing guard  
who stands in her dark blue uniform in the middle of the street,  
one arm stretched toward them, the other pointing at the waiting cars

And now as though of a sudden it is a cold and very clear morning  
full of steam and frost clouds  
and a blue tinted mist  
that lingers in the recessed hollows of the open fields  
to the west

And at the very vanishing point of the scene beyond  
the sun is a yoke of orange light amid a white haze  
that also webs the limbs of nearby trees  
along the rows of buildings to the east – a public grade school  
with its still empty playground  
and next to that some green and dark brown wooden frame houses

There are platters of ice glare in the parking lot below my window,  
a mist the color of lint drifts over the tire-scarred sandy mud  
of the road that curves up into it

And now, suddenly, the white three-decker apartment house across  
the street is startlingly bright

Now the vanishing point that leads past the horizon is really  
the point of an arrival,  
as the sun with its brighter and clear light is streaming  
into everything

and there is awakening, and the city is revealed, and there is  
new activity, and beauty

Cold Winter Day, Long Winter Night

Burning bright snow on the icy rooftops  
of the hospital buildings across the way

pale white blue sky above and going on so high, so far,  
no clouds at all –

there are the cars small in the distance  
along the tin strip of road beyond –  
the highway at the edge of town,  
small sequins-like bits of metal passing,  
a wind shield flashing occasionally

as I watch from my third story window

Dense chimney smoke slightly blue  
from a sand-colored smokestack to the east  
floating still in the air, suspended, motionless

The sun is high above,  
there seem auras of finer harder light around it  
that stream or shatter out through the sky, the entire day,  
like sight lines through an ice cube

and the edges of my window are clouded like the center of an ice cube

There's a sharpness to the grey limbs of the bare trees  
snow-crusted  
along this side of the street

they are still  
in the still and frozen afternoon

Open the window now –  
breathe the air, exhale your breath in vapor up into the sky  
  
so high, so high, so dizzyingly high – where does it  
ever end?  
How can it be that I ever will? you wonder

Already the cold is stinging your face and hands,  
reaching powerfully into the room;  
the cat is looking at you, blinking its eyes, and  
quickly leaves

Close the window then, and draw the dark green drapes;  
how still the room seems to become – quiet, warm, and dim,  
maybe make coffee or tea

Later in the long winter night as you sleep  
there will be another light with its own fire inside of you  
  
shining, burning  
  
burning on and on

## The New Season

Here on the garden path after a night of rain

it is early summer and the mid-June grass  
has just lately gotten so thick and green,  
a dark fir needle green in the early morning light

The sky still violet  
with orange sparkling through the tree line  
past the still quiet houses and the several blocks of  
garden plots,  
there is no one else around as yet

There's a web-like steamy mist in the wave-troughs of the lawn  
down near the stand of apple trees,  
already some heavy clusters of small apples in their spreading and  
leaf-frothy boughs  
lichen colored with frost –  
some the early light lights a dim gold,  
and yet some upward twisting boughs are shown in a moted  
and pink light  
that cuts across them

There's smoky white dew paint-streaked on the long grass near  
the garage  
over in the far corner in deep shade

Clouds of carbon purple with sun rays spacing them, streaming –

and the birds loud and rickety-noisy  
fluttering in wet leaves,  
some squirrels running through the bough darkness  
of the maple tree  
that canopies over the entire house

The dirt of the garden is very black –  
grainy-muddy to the touch,  
almost as cold as the rain water in this pail where I rinse my  
fingers off,

a couple of thin brown twigs floating in it, and two green leaves

Distance

A bright sun over the field,  
so strong the afternoon is heavy with the heat  
it fills the air with an intense perfume –  
grass and wild flowers,  
the ground itself seems to breathe  
there's a slight breeze in the distance near the hills  
that lie vague in a webby haze –  
insect hum – hoppers, cicadas –  
opening its own space inside the silence  
bright afternoon, intense sun at one o'clock  
the day as though somehow of another time  
In the distance there is a green farmhouse,  
out beside a red barn –  
a silver silo flashes in the light  
There are two maple trees in the house's yard where it opens on the road  
that arcs past –  
in the light the road looks made of chalk  
And now there are two young boys walking the dust shoulder –  
the taller one pauses to look inside the red painted mail box  
before they disappear running into the house's  
screened-in porch



The grass is heavy and thick in the field with timothy, crab, and mullein  
in troughs  
beside the narrow dirt path

It will be a while before I get there –

there are a few small cumuli sun-burning, motionless,  
in the bright blue sky

## The Clothesline in the Back Yard

Clothes drying on the clothes line are blown in the wind like sails –  
and white cumuli in the sky  
piled high  
drift all in one direction

The sun is over all –  
the shingles of the house next door glitter in the brightness,  
the cars parked in the driveway near the yard gleam –  
their bright windshields, and their chrome

Two small children and their mother run out from behind the garage –  
they had been out there seeing about the blackberries  
that grow along the back fence there,  
not ripe yet but they are likely turning red already,  
a pale raspberry red and green-tinged still and hard  
as buttons

The children run up near the driveway and into the back yard  
flapping their hands and yelling,  
one girl of about five and her slightly younger brother  
and their mother comes up after them  
waving her arms, as though treading water – playful, herding them

Ignoring her, they start to snatch and bat at the towels  
hanging white and pale yellow and pastel green in the sun

and then they jump up and, getting a running start, charge into  
the bigger ones head first  
and then pick out a still wet bed sheet and pretend to be two ghosts,  
their mother laughing as they yell and make ghost gestures at her  
pushing their way through it –  
two slightly dark gray shapes, like wet stains come to life,

their small arms reaching through like anemones  
as they get a bit tangled up in it,  
and she comes around to get them free of the wet folds wrapped  
around them

She has a light blue house dress on and she wipes her hands on  
the front of it  
and chases them around the sheet's other side,  
clapping her hands at them as though to say  
*quick quick quick*  
and the three of them run laughing and disappear up the green  
painted wooden steps  
of the screened-in back porch next door,  
and the wood frame door slams behind them with a clack

The breeze picks up again and the clothes all bob slightly and sway  
and the white sheet  
billows out again in a sudden strong gust –

towels and wash cloths, white briefs and pink slips, and white  
and crème color bras,  
black and brown socks,  
and a couple of white and light green button-down shirts waving  
empty sleeves

And the sun, beginning to get hot now, shines down  
up past the white and high-piled clouds

Winter Afternoon, Intense Cold Sun

The sun over the snow fields blinds you if you try to look at it

the fields down slope are a vague bright haze

off where the ice-black river turns and twists on itself  
its links of onyx and waxen gray  
sun sparks struck in it, there  
and there –

I can't see farther

the terrible cold has erased the light itself,  
if light is something to see by

The afternoon is aching to be brought into the eye,  
the eye aches in itself

in its opening, gaping, quickly narrowed and defensive squint

vision will not come forth to meet the winter afternoon

the valley frozen in its ice haze cannot rise out of the light  
to take on palpable clear outline,  
it burns to the touch of the sensitive attempt at sight

As the tongue tasting the shovel's metal

is torn and bleeds.  
my eyes bleeds its longing for vision out into the fields,  
the white horizon, the not blue sky

The day recedes unseen behind the sun's freezing auras

## Sunny Afternoon in the Field

With my eyes closed I lie in the hot sun  
all afternoon

there is a slightest breeze through the grass  
just now and then, yet fairly often

and I feel it on my face and through my hair  
and across the back of my right hand –  
my left is inside my pocket  
where I can feel how the sun is heating even the fabric of my jeans,  
and with eyes closed I see the sun –

bright hot dark, a kind of tiny seething of the eye itself, eye and eyelid  
and my face as well,  
as though all three were one  
and they were baking, drying, hovered over,  
and growing slightly separate from the rest of me –  
the sun is taking up my eyes and my face into itself  
yet leaving my body behind here

here where  
turning and opening my eyes –  
as though for a kind of first time,  
like peeling a bandage off a wound

I see the shreds and shreds of grass blades matted, yet flickering,  
in the heavy grassy ground-musty air  
yellow with sunlight around them,

and I reach my fingers through them and I feel how  
waxy cold they are

## An Invitation, with Rain

If you come out to meet me  
    where the backyard and the garden and even the grape arbor  
  we have out here  
are all full of the after-rain –  
                                with ground mist too,  
                                so veil-like wet  
    it almost seems a kind of dew up from the ground itself –  
which is not just the water dripping from the bean vines  
or trapped in the pea flowers' translucent mauve-veined white,  
    or in the central furrow of the zucchini leaf with its sequins  
  beads of rain,  
the tomato leaf ragged-edged and fringed with  
  pinhead sized droplets  
the walkway's grass slippery with a rain curtain  
that mats it down and seems to make it a darker green still  
                                so chill and wet to the touch –  
although the dog will love to roll in it, wriggling on his back  
  and flexing,  
    seeming to smile in his playfulness before he gets up  
        and runs in loopy half-circles  
    a faint rain-mist all around him –  
If you come out to see me where I've been sitting on the wet  
  wooden bench  
painted green, hacked-up a bit, the blond under-wood  
  showing through,  
    but there are no initials carved

and there's still the drip of the rain  
held in the serrated edges of the grape vine leaves over it,  
the grapes themselves small and pale mist-green  
with tough cane-like ruddy stems snaking in and through them –

I've been sitting here a while,  
while most of the shower was caught by the thick vines  
of the arbor over me,  
but not all of it so that my old green work shirt is somewhat wet  
and the front of my jeans along the thighs  
and there are some water droplets on the back of my forearm  
and wrist  
and on the side of my face too,  
but now I've wiped them off –

I am trying to make myself presentable to you –  
when will you come to see me?  
-- to meet me in the wet grass,  
in the back yard near the garden that is growing now so thick  
and dense and strong –

to see me, to meet me in the cool chill shade – but not too chill –  
of the grape arbor,  
and to sit on the bench, even if it is a little wet and hacked-up  
and old,  
to sit beside me here –

how long will it be before you come and before  
I can see you?

Unquiet Summer, the Late Evening

Unquiet of the summer evening  
    full of the many scents of the garden's earth  
and the dark red roses near it  
    the deepest flower

long shadows from the edge of the garage  
    and the house roofs along the street are dark slate  
in the last flood of orange bronze  
    the long slow sunset

    the chimney's black  
        of the boarding house half a block away

to think of being an old man there alone in a small rented room,  
    an old woman alone

A moth now in the humid shade near the garage side  
    and another humming near the plum tree  
        the street between the houses  
the empty street, no traffic here nor any passers by

The house is silent, there is no one around,  
    the windows are all dark –  
one window curtain, yellow, with some designs on it  
    I can no longer see in the twilight

        blows dented inward slightly in the breeze

At some point I will have to go inside and go to bed  
    after it's completely dark and the white moon is shining



## Indian Summer

Wasps at the window  
in the early fall

warm still air this afternoon,  
a different light than summer –

champagne left in a glass overnight  
warm, less active  
stilled

but fragrant, sticky rich

windfalls litter the ground around the apple trees,  
even the crabs are sweet now

in the later afternoon  
bleary filaments of sunlight web the gold  
and the red leaves of maple trees

Wasps hovering wavering around the open window,  
here two stories up –  
red amber bodies weaving in and through a tilted shelf of sunlight

As the light gets deeper, the fields beyond tinted, browning,  
the sky shading toward violet  
the cooler evening coming in,

they're gone

## Fields and Road at the Edge of Town

The hot day in the field with no breeze at all  
and the sun is a center point of dense streaming light  
its white rays reaching through the sky in faint cracks and streaks

the heat bearing down so heavy through the field,  
the steady stifling heat of the air  
like a kind of baking

but also like an increasing of the sky itself somehow, of the day itself,  
and the thing which is somehow under the sky –  
shall it be called the earth, and what is that? –

looking up into the sky I suddenly feel the ground underneath my step –  
dusty, flat, steady, still –  
what is another word for creation? is there any?

To the right a few hundred feet off, the slates are so blue  
of the rooftops  
of the apartment house by the bend in the road  
and then too of the Christian meeting house across the street from it  
– a luminous dark violet in the flashing froth of sunlight  
that ripples across the waves of shingles –

for in the heat, objects in the distance seem  
to waver and float  
and to be washed with a kind of vertical grain –

cicadas are burning in their secret hiding spots, covert, invisible

Fields flow down before me split through with bright zinc  
of the long road  
that goes downhill then up a steep grade at  
the valley's other edge

The grass is a deep green, and pale yellow brown strips  
frame it with narrower  
rectangles leading in their burning stillness toward the horizon and  
its rising green hills,

far hills starkly sunlit with black knife marks in them  
which are the scatterings of trees

Above that, near the white hem of sky, in the farthest distance  
straight ahead, above  
the mustard yellow of the burning bare hill crests

there are a few faint, still, loose brushings of white cumuli

Walking through the Sunset into the Night

Stepping stones of clouds  
    burnt on their undersides  
        press forward through the sky's streams

        the wind is pushing them  
and the sun to the west is an open porthole  
    through which rough seas of gold are flooding in

        slowly the burning deck is sinking  
    beneath waves of the distant hills

shipwreck of twilight earth  
    burnt off masts of trees still held up  
        in midst of a steady deepening  
    the final inclination into the astronomical,  
        its onyx and diamond world

    Deep night and  
now of a sudden the street is in thrall to the night's myth  
    lustrous the flute harmonics, although nearly silent –  
    tambor and tapping and soft rasps of the un-silent wood

        the trees themselves,  
gateway upon gateway to a beyond and a within,  
    custodial darkness of lore and obsession

        branch shadows are darkened blood vessels,  
        crazed wind-throbbing  
inside the mirror tain of the moon's sidewalk

Autumn Morning, Bright Thaw

The apple branch coated with bright ice  
melting now in thaw –

the icy sleeve breaks away in scales  
as I grasp it  
and it numbs my hand  
sharp in wet crumbling –  
cool drops trickling down the heel of my palm and wrist  
and I let the branch spring back

Smell the rotting windfalls  
mashed down in long grass –  
pulpy brown in an ice-coated shininess –  
a quick note of fermenting, a cold cellar smell,  
a kind of sweetish manure scent –  
acid earth must, and a hay sharpness  
in bright freezing fresh cold morning air

breathe it in deeply now, and then breathe in still more –  
taste the air, the wet ground, the rotted windfalls, the whole day

Tree trunk  
so strong rough and twisting  
up out of the paper-brown wild grass swirl  
stiffened over on itself in crystalized frost

The air steams with chill  
and the light is cold  
and the sky is blue and radiant and wide  
and a white sun shines far up high

## A Direction

Take up the rain  
and take the sun

take up the soil  
from the depths of earth  
take up the leaves and flowers  
and their hidden seeds

take up the golden hay the bright green corn  
the grass so blue the sky so green  
with yellow sunlight  
with the charred sunset  
the brighter yellow of the dandelion  
white web and doily of the Queen Anne's lace  
that floats like foam within the green field's waves

take up the shards of leaves burnt stained with frost  
and dried flaking stiff  
take up the ice skin filming the dark street's puddle  
in an early and cold morning of frost steam

take up the street  
fresh with a cold spring rain  
spring blossoms littered on it from the sudden storm  
take up the storm  
and take the night through which it blows

layers of the night folded on themselves  
a deeply woven rose

the crevices of its petals elusive to the touch

## A Tree

Light contained in the netting  
of the tree's dark  
branches spreading

green and woven  
all around the crowded space, the inner pathways

branching

and water too, and deeply

from the sky, sun-traversed

and from the depth  
of captured earth, searching through the root systems,  
the blind rumors

In spring the shearings of bright rain  
and the arriving light,  
in summer the siphoned tangent products  
of a fierce geometric sun

How many forests  
breaking upward in the wave  
of a single tree?

chaotic and bright, the manifold of shore

singular uncountable currents

infinite tide

Dreaming

Night burns with paper dreams  
inside the furnace sleep

shivering fire crowding the alembic  
luminous flakes  
hand prints soot blackened

touchings, testings –

within or without? –  
thick flames of color  
gather limbs once dark, burnt stick remnants lying now

glittering  
fire ash of  
web-like constellations display

the talismans that guard the inner room  
in its dense luminous infinity,  
that map the outer vacancy –  
amid wide night drafts

– draftings –  
cold, rumorous



## Assessment

Something is moving through the trees  
in the night outside –  
is it the wind? is it something?  
nothing?

And above in the spreading branches  
fringed with black leaves –  
what is it in the night's  
silent disturbance  
that the ear, the mind, the heart receives?

The bright September moon shines through.  
(What am I doing here, what will I ever do?)

Down in the street below the truck for the dumpster  
is just getting through  
hauling away the trash;  
traffic jars past on the busy street off a ways.

I remember so little, yet so much,  
of my early, middle and later nights and days.  
I have only bad memories.  
And though frequently laughed at, and with,  
I was never loved.

## Assessment II

Blue green moonlight with its shadow-veins

leaf pages blowing,  
leaf hands catching at them

at the corner of the room  
near the window so open now

but within the sky's waters –  
which are the wind,  
which are the moonlight

there is dream, and the source of dream  
floating in the surface, deep in the surface  
of the moonlit floor  
shadows floating in it like flowers in a bowl

and wind shapes touch mind corners  
and mind centers as well –

heart waking, not waking  
crying aloud to wake,  
asleep

again and again

Dip your face past the deep well,  
mirror surface of night

When will you be whole, with the amulet of fire around you,  
wipe your face free of the ash? –

burnt pages of the dream

Autumn Night with Heavy Rain and Full Moon

Wind-swirling tree knifed through  
    with a seething –  
        slashes of the rain,  
collapsing dented tree sails luffing  
    about to blow –  
    branches taut stretching and shaking

olive gray undersides of the leaves suddenly luminous,  
    as they are shed about  
and the road is bone white  
    in the moonlight

Starkly illuminated framework of the tree  
    gray and recessed  
    amid lightning's spotlight

Above the wind,  
    there are coal smoke pillars  
        diaphanous violet petal cumuli  
        of storm clouds

    Thrown the switch now –  
        electric current of denser rain –  
lightning phosphorous again  
    and a flare is lit inside the tree

    Ozone scent like gun smoke  
        of a broken apart world

but there is more wind now,  
    and a rain curtain veils the scene in grainy granuled sepia

## Incantation

### Moon

earth-tree  
branches            speaking loud the night wind  
                         leaf  
listening   whisper   past night water

brightened now,  
peaceful

anticipating   death

The water streams

yet only one place   sleeping   waking   know

echoes   earth   sun   moon

Moonflower lichen on rock  
                         in the blue green light  
near the pine tree

There bent over in rain,  
the paper-colored grass

White blue, full of snow,  
swiped feather-clouds

Stones of silver, gold grains of charmed sands,  
    glints of purple light  
    wavering spirit minnow moon flecks,  
                                moon sun-sparkle  
the pool black and still  
    chained with spots of mercury and gold  
  
    cloudless sky, star-figured fires  
    and our silence  
  
    far in the ascending, in anticipation

## A Winter Day

Snow scarves loosed to mid day's freezing light,  
(Though all dark bindings and discovered prints  
Had steeped in small bright wells their waxen threads)  
Lay down new cloaks to earth, papered, starlit.

Yet leaves of the hierophant and pythoness  
In rising vortexes of cicadas' blue  
Conceal a discord, manifold yet true,  
Stark radiance of waking into brightest plains.

Dim and decisive day – they flee from me,  
Theft of the arching timepiece, these possessions:  
Streams of these ashen scars, flowing quite free,

Bleed a resplendent graphite from my veins –  
Splinters of light held in the bright sun mirror,  
There where I greet the shadow's overture.

## Renewal

Cold rain in April –  
    my birthday is drawing near;  
        I am moving into a new apartment,  
    this one already half bare

The clouds so bright in the sky,  
    the cold sky of a spring midday:  
        deep, deep blue straight up above  
    but whiter toward the low edge

Space and light – space, light, and time!  
    What is the nature of change?  
How much I have undergone, how much has slipped away

    Yet I hold it all in myself

I am glad, glad, glad  
    to have survived thus far,  
    this strenuous arduous life – and many dangers too –  
        having passed through

What have I passed into now? –  
    an extra realm of blue,  
    of clear sky, high and gold and such light-burnished clouds,  
        cold clean air – clear, bright

    It is not the cold air of autumn,  
        instead it is the air of a very cold spring

There is a scoured freshness to the face of the earth itself

    There is a brightness to everything

Elsewhere

Dark room with the night wind moving secretly through,  
somewhere in curtains, just past the sill –  
the moon, the stars

There through the window  
the trees move without cease  
going nowhere in the wind

a sidewalk's pavement squares  
looking like praline and chalk  
in the moon's autumn light  
in the blue street light

walkers passing down on the street below  
see them as stair steps  
leading on somewhere  
to where?

And a face might be suddenly there  
in the leaves,  
just as quickly disappear,  
seen but once

How often one thinks, and then thinks again –  
what do I know, where have I been? –  
images of times places  
faces that glint quick and small  
in a dark confusion of lights,  
bright dim shapes of shadows there on the wall

where have I been, where am I going?

elsewhere





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

STEVEN FRATTALI is an American writer living in Taipei and Boston. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* (ELS, 2002) and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*. (Peter Lang, 2005)

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